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ABSTRACT

In this paper several definitions of equality of educational opportunity are presented and discussed with respect to their implications for black Americans. Inequality may be defined in terms of degree of racial segregation, relative availability of financial and other educational resources, relative effectiveness of educational programs in encouraging cognitive growth and the development of positive attitudes toward school and self, and availability of opportunities to learn about and develop pride in one's own cultural heritage. It is argued that equality of educational opportunity implies much more than racial balance or equal facilities. The basic requirement is equal respect for different racial and cultural groups. This implies moving away from universalistic notions about curricula and centralized control of school systems toward pluralistic programs and decentralized control. (Author)

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PLURALISM AND AMERICAN EDUCATION:

A BLACK PERSPECTIVE*

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Blacks have posed an educational dilemma for white Americans almost from the beginning of the nation. Since this early period, the issues have changed very little. The basic issues have always centered around two questions: 1) Can blacks be educated (to the same degree as whites)? 2) Should they be educated (to the same extent as whites)? Almost as pervasive has been a third question--if they are to be educated, should they be educated along with whites or should they be educated separately in segregated facilities? None of these questions has been completely resolved to the satisfaction of blacks even today.

It is common knowledge that, before the Civil War, Southern legislators handled black education by making it a crime to teach black people. It is less generally known that, in the North, blacks were also excluded from the earliest schools. While the history of legal segregation in the South is too well known to repeat here, it may be instructive to provide a brief description of Northern school segregation. Vincent Franklin, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, is studying the persistence of school segregation in the urban north from a historical perspective. He has found that the situation of blacks in urban public schools has a distinct continuity. Segregated private schools existed in the North before 1800. The Philadelphia Abolition Society

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began sponsoring private schools for blacks during the 1790's. By 1822, legally segregated schools for blacks had been established in Philadelphia. Before the Civil War, segregated public schools also existed in such cities as New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Washington, Baltimore, St. Louis, Kansas City, Cincinnati, and Columbus. In these cities, black students attended all black schools, frequently staffed completely with black teachers and administrators. Schools were legally segregated in many northern cities until well into the twentieth century. Of course, de facto segregation flourishes today.

Even the current controversy about the relative merits of separate and integrated schooling has early northern historical antecedents. During the abolitionist movement before the Civil War, some black leaders supported separate schools while others supported mixed schools. Parents, then as now, made their personal decisions on the basis of convenience, concern for children's feelings, and their own aspirations for their children. It is important that we understand, and never forget, that it was the white belief in the inherent inferiority of black people which made separate schools necessary. This same type of racism is the basis for the current educational problems of black Americans. Since we are still facing the same dilemmas nearly 200 years later, it may be useful to say what we should expect of public education today and in the next few decades.

What forms should education take if it is to serve the social and political needs of black people in America? What do black Americans want from the educational system? What impact will "The Black Revolution" have on education during the next three decades? These are the broad questions which are frequently lost in the heat of conflicts focused on specific issues such as busing, community control, testing, and

compensatory education. Much of the uncertainty about goals and strategies which currently plagues policy makers is attributable to the emergence during the 1960's of the complex of attitudes and behaviors connoted by the term Black Power. As it is typically used, Black Power includes both the demand for separatism and a willingness to use any means necessary to attain the liberation of black Americans. It also connotes the affirmation of black values and pride in the African heritage. Since the Black Power Movement contradicts many of the most cherished goals of the Civil Rights Movement, especially the goal of racial integration, it is not surprising that blacks are now divided on such issues as "violence vs. non-violence," "separatism vs. integration," and "black identity vs. American identity." There is also the traditional division of opinion concerning the degree of moderation or militancy blacks should employ in their efforts to achieve liberation and equality. James Farmer has stated the issue very well: "The question stripped bare is this: What is the way for black Americans to find a meaning for their existence and to achieve dignity in the American context? Is it through assimilation? Or is it through racial cohesiveness?"[1] I think Farmer is basically correct in his opinion that events today seem to support the forces of cohesion to such an extent that most black leaders and organizations embrace the concepts of black pride and black identity even if they reject separatism and the use of violence.

In seeking answers to questions about educational goals and strategies, it is necessary to consider education within the larger framework of American race relations. The present educational situation in which schools fail to educate large numbers of blacks to even the minimal level expected of American adults is one manifestation of the consequences of

being black in America. The history of black education is replete with examples of blacks striving to obtain quality education, sometimes with the assistance of liberal whites, while racist whites denied them access to educational facilities and programs or provided separate and, typically, inferior education. The widespread belief among whites that blacks are not educable is sometimes stated euphemistically; e.g., "Their backgrounds have not prepared them to appreciate or comprehend the higher level intellectual pursuits, therefore, they would only become frustrated and alienated if we encouraged them to participate fully in academic life." This permits whites to feel superior and morally correct while excluding blacks from schools and training programs. The economic system has also provided support for black educational neglect. The demand for a large supply of unskilled inexpensive labor encouraged whites to limit the amount of education available to blacks because too much education would "spoil them for hard work." The combination of the belief in black intellectual inferiority and the need for a pool of unskilled labor resulted in educational policies designed to keep the majority of blacks from escaping their low position in the occupational structure and to maintain the favored status of whites. There was nothing inconsistent in the pronouncements of whites which touted education as the pathway to success and participation in the mainstream of society while at the same time they designed programs which forced blacks to remain in subordinate positions, uneducated, and living in poverty.

In spite of the fact that American education has served blacks so poorly in the past, black Americans share with other ethnic groups the belief that education is the means by which groups move from rejection, poverty, and political exclusion to acceptance, economic sufficiency, and political inclusion. Few Americans today would disagree with the

principle of equality of educational opportunity for all racial, religious, and ethnic groups. There is considerable disagreement, however, on the meaning of equal educational opportunity.

Inequality of Opportunity

The traditional view of equal educational opportunity stresses equal access to schooling. In this view, equality of educational opportunity is attained when there is roughly equal opportunity for different segments of the population to compete for the benefits of the educational system.[2] The modern view of equality goes much further. According to Coleman, there are at least five ways to conceptualize inequality of opportunity:

> first, inequality defined by degree of racial segregation; second, inequality of resource inputs from the school system; third, inequality in 'intangible' resources such as teacher morale; fourth, inequality of inputs as weighted according to their effectiveness for achievement; and fifth, inquality of output as prima facie evidence of inequality of opportunity.[3]

Each of these conceptions of inequality of opportunity is discussed below.

Inequality of inputs. The first, second, and third definitions of inequality are concerned with inequality of inputs whether defined in terms of the race and class of one's fellow students or in terms of financial resources, facilities, and personnel. In its desegregation decision of 1954, the Supreme Court held that separate schools for black and white children are inherently unequal. By this yardstick, American public education remains largely unequal in nearly every school system in the United States. Because of its prior history of legal segregation, efforts to eliminate segregated schools have proceeded more rapidly in the South than in the North. However, court decisions in Richmond, Detroit, and other cities may result in desegregation of schools in large urban

systems through metropolitan desegregation plans that include contiguous suburban districts. This approach is necessary because recent white migration to the suburbs has resulted in such massive population shifts that many large city systems are predominantly black and may become all-black within the decade. The result of this "white flight" is that resegregation proceeds almost as rapidly as desegregation. Metropolitan desegregation plans would shut off the escape routes.

When inequality is defined in terms of the resource inputs from the school system, we also find inequality both within systems and between inner-city schools and suburban schools. Recently Coleman has pointed out that even if actual dollar expenditures within a system are disbursed equitably by the board of education, there is still the question of inequality of inputs as <u>received by the child</u>.[4] For example, if a school board spends the same amount for textbooks in two schools with the same number of children but which serve children of different social class backgrounds, the books may be of lesser value to children in the lower-class school because the content of the books is more attuned to the interests and academic styles of the middle-class children. In other words, there may be a loss of input between what is disbursed and what is received which operates to reduce the resources received by the average black child.

When we look at "intangible resources" such as teacher morale, we encounter two problems. On the one hand, schools attended by blacks are considered to be low status schools from which upwardly mobile teachers seek to escape as fast as possible. On the other hand, blacks are viewed by many teachers and administrators as being difficult pupils. Kenneth B. Clark has placed much of the responsibility for the academic problems

of ghetto children squarely on the teachers and school administrators.[5] Negative labels such as "culturally deprived," and "learning disability" may be used as excuses for educational neglect. According to this view, a key factor leading to the academic failure of ghetto children is the fact that generally their teachers do not expect them to learn, and have adopted , as their concept of their function, custodial care and discipline.

Advocates of community control, decentralization, and various separatist alternatives to the public schools base much of their argument on two beliefs. First, they are very doubtful that white controlled educational systems will distribute material resources equitably. Second, they are even more doubtful about such intangibles as teacher attitudes and expectations. They argue for community control as a means of assuring equitable distribtuion of both types of inputs.

Inequality of outputs. The fourth definition of inequality raises questions about the effectiveness of inputs for enhancing children's achievement. Equalizing finances, facilities, and other resources may have little effect on children's achievement. More precisely, some inputs may be more important for achievement than others. Unfortunately, there is little reliable information available in this area. Proponents of specialized programs make strong claims for their effectiveness, but none have been shown to be unequivocally superior to others. Proponents of desegregation as an intervention strategy to improve black children's achievement encounter the same problem. The results are mixed and subject to considerable controversy.

While the legal case for desegregation has been spelled out clearly in court decisions, there is considerable controversy as to whether or not

children derive educational benefits from desegregation other than those attributable to such inputs as improved curricula, better teachers, and better facilities. There is still very little hard data that would allow us to state unequivocally that, given equal inputs, children would still receive inferior education in all-black schools. It is often contended that racially identifiable schools have harmful effects on the achievement, self-concepts and attitudes of all children. While this view is held by many educators and social psychologists and is supported by the results of the "Coleman Report," opposition is now developing on two fronts. The first attack comes from studies of the effects of desegregation which raise questions about the benefits in terms of improved achievement for black children and increased racial tolerance for white children.[6] In spite of the controversy concerning the educational and social benefits of desegregation, there is general agreement that student benefits are greater in biracial situations where conflict and hostility are at a minimum. Sometimes a distinction is made between "desegregation" and "integration." Congenial racial interaction is typically considered to be a necessary ingredient of an "integrated" situation, while the mere presence of children of different races is sufficient for desegregation. The bulk of the evidence so far suggests that increased racial tolerance and improved achievement occur only in "integrated" situations and that both tolerance and achievement may decline in "desegregated" situations.

The other point of attack is concerned with the implicit racism of a philosophy that assumes that black children can learn effectively only when they are in classrooms where the majority of the students are white. While the proponents of integration do not state their position so bluntly, there is the clear assumption that black schools are inferior although this inferiority is usually explained in terms of differential resources.

Black opponents of desegregation may point to research results which indicate that self-esteem and race pride are higher in black schools than in biracial schools.[7] They may also note the paucity of research with adequate controls for selectivity among studies purporting to show improved achievement in biracial schools. At least one study reports results indicating that community controlled schools can enhance academic achievement.[8] Since there are reasons to doubt the effectiveness of desegregation as an intervention strategy that will lead to better quality education for black children, many people are asking whether or not the hardships associated with desegregation are too great a price to pay for such nebulous returns.

When inequality is defined in terms of benefits or outputs, we are also faced with the problem of deciding what criteria should be used to measure achievement. Typically, achievement test scores are used as criterion measures. In some instances, I.Q. scores have been used for this purpose. Scores on these tests are used to measure gains in achievement within a group or to compare achievement between groups. The worth of a program or the progress of a group are determined by changes in test scores. This practice is widespread in spite of the fact that many questions have been raised about the appropriateness of using tests standardized on whites to assess achievement in groups with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The testing issue is extremely important, but it is too complex for inclusion in this paper. At this point, it is sufficient to draw attention to the importance attached to test results while questions of validity are still being debated and knowledge concerning the relationship of group experience and values to cognitive styles and learning patterns is still extremely limited.

In attempting to assess the relative merits of desegregation, integration, decentralization, or various curriculum strategies, the criterion issue is of greatest importance. Certainly black parents want their children to learn to read and to acquire the skills needed for social and occupational success. For some parents, other concerns are equally important. For example: Does the school provide an opportunity for the child to learn about his cultural heritage? Is he able to share in the psychological rewards associated with being identified as a member of a group whose contributions to the development of the nation have been important and respected? Does he have an opportunity to acquire a sense of competence, a positive self-image, and a sense of group pride?

For persons who share these concerns, desegregation as currently practiced raises the specter of the elimination of minority group culture. For them, the danger is that school desegregation may result in cultural homogenization. They would prefer to seek solutions that provide opportunities for acquiring the knowledge and technical skills needed to survive in an urbanized technological society without having to become alienated from one's social heritage.

Integration and Community Control

The issue of integration is one of the most controversial dilemmas still facing American educators and politicians. In a recent article, Taylor provides a good description of the important cases and the key legal issues still before the courts.[9] He states that the crucial elements of the Richmond and Detroit decisions were: (1) state responsibility for public education; (2) the containment of black people in the central city by policies of housing discrimination; and (3) the lack of justification for maintaining separate districts in a single metropolitan

community where such districting resulted in segregated schools. He argues that logistic problems involving transportation of children are manageable and may be resolved without undue hardship to children. He also argues that metropolitan desegregation, if accompanied by decentralization, need not decrease opportunities for community participation.

Not all black parents agree that the goal of integration is worth the sacrifices involved, especially when children must bear the burden of racial hostility. In addition to opposition based on concerns about possible negative consequences of metropolitan desegregation for children, some black leaders oppose this strategy because it may lead to metropolitan government. Such a development, they argue, would dilute black voting strength and make it difficult for blacks to elect representatives to local, state, and federal governing bodies. Taylor counters this argument by pointing out that representation is a separate legal issue that must be handled apart from the school issue.

Green also feels that there is no necessary conflict between the goals of community participation and metropolitan desegregation.[10] He argues for a broader definition of community than that commonly used by advocates of community control. He envisions a biracial educational community, based on school attendance districts rather than on geography or ethnicity. Metropolitan desegregation accompanied by decentralization of administrative functions would permit parents to have as much influence in metropolitan school affairs as they currently have in suburban districts. Green, like Taylor, views busing as a viable mechanism for eliminating segregation in metropolitan districts. No other approach is likely to result in any lasting desegregation. When combined with decentralization, the concept of metropolitan school desegregation could serve the goals of both integration and community control.

Many blacks prefer a more nationalistic concept of community control than that used by Green. Reed argues that the push for community control of public schools is essentially a political reform movement whose objective is to wrest power from traditional boards of education and shift it to local communities or school districts.[11] There is an assumption that such a shift in power will make schools more responsive to the needs of black children and black communities and decreases alienation between school and community. Reed also states that community control of schools can and should result in improved student academic performance because teachers and administrators would be accountable to the community. This, he asserts, would lead to "a climate of individual respect" and higher pupil expectations which should lead to improved achievement. While there is no evidence that these educational benefits would be forthcoming, there is little doubt that community control would challenge the current urban power blocs as exemplified by the central school boards and teachers unions. Other than increasing the proportion of black teachers and administrators, and the expansion of black oriented programs and materials, community control advocates have not described in sufficient detail the processes involved in improving the quality of education available to black children. It is probable that if community control became a reality, few black educators would be prepared to implement programs that would lead to improved achievement. It is also probable that there would be considerable disagreement among blacks about appropriate criteria of achievement or what constitutes a good program. The political goals of community control are more clearly defined than the educational goals.

How prevalent are racial solidarity sentiments in black communities? Results of interviews in one northern and one southern city provide an estimate of the extent to which having black teachers for black students,

black control of black schools, and using busing to implement desegregation are endorsed by black adults.[12] Comparing these results with the results of other surveys, the authors conclude that black solidarity sentiments are on the rise. However, about one-fifth of the sample agree that black students should have only black teachers, more than one-third agree that black educators should run black schools, but more than half agree that busing does more harm than good. These results suggest that there is considerable support for multi-racial staffing and administration of schools, but little support for busing. It is interesting to note that sourtherners are more in favor of busing than northerners, and that the more higher educated respondents were less likely to endorse community control and all black teachers than less educated respondents, but were more favorable toward busing. Age and sex also affected responses to these issues, as did degree of alienation as measured by an anomie scale. The authors conclude that pressures for separatist or nationalist solutions to educational problems are more likely to come from lower status urban blacks than from more advantaged blacks. These results suggest that unless the better educated segment of the black community increases its support for community control and other nationalistic strategies, the political clout needed to bring about such changes in school organization will not be forthcoming.

One result of the increase in black solidarity sentiment that has taken place in the past few years has been an increase in the number of black school administrators. If community control movements are successful, systems with largely black students are likely to turn increasingly to black administrators in an effort to find the kind of leadership needed to improve educational quality. Charles Moody has described some of the experiences of pioneer black superintendents and the problems they

faced.[13] Moody's account makes it clear that hiring a black superintendent is no panacea, especially if the school system is not prepared to provide him with adequate resources and authority to get the job done. Moody's article suggests that black administrators are rarely brought into a system before it has already become financially and politically impossible to manage. The position of black superintendents parallels that of black mayors; typically they are brought into a situation in which local resources are grossly inadequate, therefore, they cannot improve conditions without assistance from state and federal agencies. The end result is a powerless top administrator who takes the blame for educational problems, but cannot mobilize the resources needed to improve on the situation. Community control of schools, including the school board and the superintendent, is meaningless without adequate resources and local control of those resources.

Education for Liberation

Sizemore argues that the most effective programs for the masses of the African-American poor seem to be those which encourage self-determination along cultural-ethno-religious lines.[14] She draws on the work of Carter Woodson as well as the experiences of African leaders to develop a rationale for educational strategies that would lead to self-reliance. According to Sizemore, the heart of the black liberation curriculum is the dialogue which must be carried on with the learner through all the institutions serving him, the school, the church, the family, and the community organization. Such a curriculum uses the language and life style of the learner to facilitate learning. She also suggests that in situations of powerlessness, it may be more important to develop collective orientations than individual orientations. In order to implement a

liberation curriculum in the public schools, community control or decentralization would be necessary. To be effective, however, the local board would have to have veto power on matters of personnel and budget. She concludes that African-Americans must answer the following questions before they can design an educational program for liberation: (1) What kind of person do we want? (2) What kind of society will we build? (3) What will education be designed to do? (4) What kind of program will prepare the masses for liberation within a capitalist framework which guarantees losers? We also need a better understanding of the way the oppressive society operates, and a better understanding of the strengths of the oppressed community which could be mobilized for liberation.

According to Banks, the ultimate goal of a liberation curriculum is to make black students intelligent political activists so that they will know how to get and maintain power.[15] Banks contends that we must create an open society in America to liberate blacks from oppression. This would require the redistribution of power so that currently excluded groups could share power with dominant groups. It is not clear how this redistribution of power is to come about, but Banks assumes that education can play a role in bringing it to pass if the curriculum is structured properly. This assumption seems to be based on the highly probabilistic eventuality that those in power will not recognize the revolution taking place in the schools and prevent its occurrence.

Higher Education for Black Americans

Whether one takes a nationalistic or an integrationist approach to black education, there is little disagreement among blacks on the need for increasing the numbers and proportions of blacks attaining higher

education. The black community needs well trained leaders and professionals. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education has estimated that the number of blacks in college should double by the end of this decade and double again by the year 2000. Most of this increase will take place in white colleges and universities because, even at full capacity enrollments, the 100 or so black colleges cannot accommodate more than one-fourth of the anticipated increase in black student enrollment.

There currently are about 520,000 black college students. The proportions of black students in black (35%) and white (34%) four-year colleges are about equal.[16] The remaining students are enrolled in two-year colleges. It is probable that dropout and completion rates in the two types of four-year institutions will be somewhat comparable, but it is also quite probable that a much smaller proportion of students entering two-year colleges will complete a baccalaureate degree. Since the large increase in black enrollments has taken place quite recently, most of these students are still in the first two years of college. It will be another year or two before we will know with any degree of certainty whether or not the white colleges which, according to Bayer, are attracting the best black students are also providing them with sufficient resources to see them through the matriculation process to graduation. It is of interest to note that students at black colleges are more likely to have graduate school aspirations. Whether this is a result of self-selection, recruitment, or institutional impact is also a question about which we need additional information.

Concluding statement

We are still a long way from answering the questions raised at the beginning of this essay. While there is no disagreement about the fact that black Americans are being miseducated today as in the past, there is little consensus as to the most effective way to eliminate miseducation and replace it with appropriate education. One type of miseducation is manifested in the European bias that permeates almost all educational theory and practice. Appropriate education in a pluralistic society would begin with the development of programs that use the cultural context of the black experience to determine the values, goals, and content of education. This focus is nationalistic, sometimes separatist, but always self-consciously black. The objective is to liberate blacks by helping them develop a political consciousness and a knowledge of the social structure that will enable them to attain power and maintain it. Advocates of this approach do not minimize the need for blacks to acquire academic skills; they want the acquisition of skills to occur within a framework that will encourage blacks to work for self-determination and development of the black community.

The other type of miseducation is manifested in the failure of American education to do an effective job of preparing blacks for competition in an urbanized technological society. If one accepts the basic objectives of American education, the problem of appropriate education for black Americans is perceived as one of making the system work for blacks in the same manner it works for whites. This is essentially a reformist position which looks to such strategies as integration, reorganization of school financing, curriculum revision, and compensatory education to eradicate inequities in the

system. Such reforms, if successful, would eliminate race as a discriminatory factor, but leave intact those aspects of the educational system which discriminate according to social class and place of residence.

Two recent historical works seriously question the widely accepted belief that the public schools have served as the primary source of acculturation and eventual upward social mobility for immigrants and other low status groups.[17] These authors argue that the public schools have always operated to perserve the status quo, that schools have had little impact on the relative positions of ethnic groups in America, and that blacks and other minorities would be extremely naive to place their hopes for equality on the schools. There is little doubt that the schools have served some groups better than others. The basic question is whether or not the groups benefiting most from the schools were more advantaged upon entry into the system than groups benefiting less from the system. The bulk of the evidence seems to support an affirmative answer. Immigrant groups whose members had relative high status in their home countries, came from urban settings, or had strong intellectual traditions fared rather well in the schools. Those groups comprised of low status immigrants, from rural settings, without strong intellectual traditions encountered problems similar to those faced by contemporary minorities. The major difference today is that minority groups are no longer willing to accept this state of affairs as normal or just.

Many writers have approached black education as if there is a homogeneous entity called the black community. It should not be

necessary to remind educators and social scientists that blacks in America range from rich to poor, urban to rural, well-educated to illiterate, politically conservative to revolutionary, and from separatist to integrationist. Political leaders, educators, and other policy makers must take this diversity into consideration as they evaluate strategies to bring to an end the miseducation of black Americans.

FOOTNOTES

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11. Rodney J. Reed, "The Community School Board," School Review (May, 1973).

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14. Barbara A. Sizemore, "Education for Liberation," School Review (May,1973).

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